



Belfast City Council

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Report to: | Development Committee |
| Subject: | Visual Arts Feasibility Study |
| Date: | 4 September 2012 |
| Reporting Officer: | John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470 |
| Contact Officers: | Shirley McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives, ext 3459 |

| 1 | Relevant Background Information |
|----------|---|
| 1.1 | Members will be aware that the new draft Cultural Framework 2012-15 notes that Council will take a leadership role on the strategic alignment and co-ordination of the culture and arts sector, will provide opportunities for organisations to develop and diversify their income streams, and will promote partnership working and collaboration. |
| 1.2 | Belfast City Council has been approached by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland in relation to providing support for a needs analysis and feasibility study for visual arts in Belfast. Following comparative analysis with UK cities, it has been identified that Belfast needs to look at the future provision of visual culture in order to compete nationally and internationally, including options of a hub, collaborations, mergers. The idea for the project has been voiced in a number of public forums, including the Arts Council's Consultation on the Ormeau Baths Gallery closure, the Arts Council's Visual Arts Stakeholders Group and the Arts & Business in-camera event at Stormont. |
| 1.3 | The needs analysis and feasibility study would look at the potential for four or more arts venues to co-locate in one venue or combine to form a new arts institute and hub for contemporary art. It is in response to the city's need for destination venues and the sector's need for shared resources to best use funding available. |
| 1.4 | The aim is not just to provide a world class visitor destination, but also to represent the artists, creative industries practitioners and craftspeople living and working in Belfast. |

| | |
|----------|--|
| 2 | Key Issues |
| 2.1 | The feasibility study will cost a total of £25,000. The Arts Council would provide 75% (£18,750) and Members are asked to consider approval of the further 25% (£6,250). |
| 2.2 | The four principle venues participating in the initial feasibility study are Golden Thread Gallery, Belfast Exposed, PLACE, Queen's Film Theatre. Consultation will be a key part of the study and will be reflected in any outcomes. It will identify the need, the best solution and the future sustainability for such a project. |
| 2.3 | Combining four arts organizations will dramatically increase the breadth of activities offered and the increased building size will make these activities available to a wider number of people. Each of the organizations taking part in the feasibility study has a separate area of expertise and attracts a different audience. Housed under one roof, the new venue will allow audiences to conveniently visit a selection of art forms when they previously may have only visited one. |
| 2.4 | The result should be a study that reflected the existing arts provision in Belfast and that makes a number of suggestions as to the feasibility of a new project. The tender process for the consultation document would require consultation with all art galleries, individual artists, as well as key stakeholders. The project would be overseen by the project partners and the steering committee that will include representatives of both Belfast City Council and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. |
| 2.5 | If approval is given, we would recommend that the study also includes a review of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Belfast's visual arts infrastructure, exhibition and workplace provision including the impact of new gallery capital developments such as the MAC, An Culturlann and the Ulster Museum, the impact of the Ormeau Baths Gallery closing, and a review of workspace provision including Queen's Street Studios' plans for relocation. – A review of City Investment Programme and City Masterplan from a visual arts perspective, including an audit of Council publicly owned assets to ascertain potential partnership opportunities. – Opportunities arising from creative industries and cultural tourism, including proposals for creative digital hubs. |

| | |
|----------|---|
| 3 | Resource Implications |
| 3.1 | <u>Finance</u> The feasibility study will cost a total of £25,000. The Arts Council will provide 75% (£18,750) and Members are asked to consider approval of the further 25% (£6250) to be provided for within the current Tourism, Culture and Arts Budget 2012/13. |

| | |
|----------|--|
| 4 | Equality and Good Relations Considerations |
| 4.1 | There are no Equality and Good Relations Considerations attached to this report. |

| | |
|----------|--|
| 5 | Recommendations |
| 5.1 | It is recommended that Members; <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Note the contents of this report2. Consider approval of support of £6,250 to support 25% of a needs analysis for visual arts in Belfast and feasibility study for arts venues to co-locate and combine to form an arts institute. |

| | |
|--|--------------------------|
| 6 | Decision Tracking |
| There is no Decision Tracking attached to this report. | |

| | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| 7 | Key to Abbreviations |
| ACNI – Arts Council of Northern Ireland | |